

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held at the County Borough Council Offices, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park, and Clydach Vale on Wednesday 21st November 2018 at 5 p.m.

PRESENT

County Borough Councillor S. Rees – Owen – in the Chair

County Borough Councillors

J. Brencher	S. Evans	W. Lewis
A. Calvert	M. Griffiths	S. Powell

Non – Committee Members in attendance

County Borough Councillor S. Evans – Vice Chair of Overview and Scrutiny

Co-opted Members

Mr J. Fish – Voting Elected Parent/ Governor Representative
D. Price – Representing UNISON

Officers in Attendance

Ms G Davies – Director of Education and Inclusion Services
Ms L. Jones – ALN Transformation Lead Central South Region
Ms J. Allen – Head of Attendance and Wellbeing
Mr P. Nicholls – Head of Legal Litigation, Planning & Environment, Community and
Children Services

17. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from: County Borough Councillors H. Boggis, J. Davies, H. Fychan, J. Harries, L. Hopper, G. Jones, M. Powell, G. Stacey, Co-Opted Members Mr S. Emanuel and Mrs N. Crowley

18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

RESOLVED – that in accordance with Members Code of Conduct, there were no personal interests made at the meeting pertaining to the agenda.

19. MINUTES

RESOLVED – To approve as an accurate record the Minutes of the 26th September 2018 subject to it being noted that a Member felt more information need to be included regarding page 46 paragraph 3 of the agenda.

20 MATTERS ARISING

1. Members sought clarification as to why the item on 21st Century Schools programme was not the agenda for this evenings meeting.
2. The Head of Democratic Services explained that a meeting has been set up for this Committee on the 19th Decembers to comment specifically upon the 21st Century Schools Proposals in the Cynon Valley and Greater Pontypridd, which the Cabinet were currently consulting upon.
3. The Head of Democratic Services confirmed that once appropriate data and information was available in respect of Band A, this detail would be provided to inform members future scrutiny of Band B proposals.
4. It was Agreed that the information relating to page 46, paragraph 3 of the agenda of the 28th September would be forwarded to the Democratic Officer for inclusion within the minutes

21. ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS AND EDUCATIONAL TRIBUNAL (ALNET) ACT OVERVIEW

The Chair and the Director of Education and Inclusion Services welcomed the ALN Transformation Lead Central South Region to the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.

The ALN Transformation Lead Central South Region explained that the purpose of the report is to update Members on the work undertaken across

the region to prepare for the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and Tribunal (Wales) Act (2018).

It was explained that the Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal Bill was passed by the National Assembly for Wales on 12th December 2017 and after receiving Royal Assent became the Additional Learning Needs Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (ALNET) ON 24th January 2018.

Members were informed that the aims of the ALNET is to create:

- A unified legislative framework to support all children of compulsory school age or below with additional learning needs(ALN) and to support young people with ALN who are in school or further education (FE)
- An integrated, collaborative process of assessment, planning and monitoring which facilitates early, timely and effective interventions
- A fair and transparent system for providing information and advice, and for resolving concerns and appeals.

The ALN Transformation Lead Central South Region explained that the ALN System set out in the Act will be fully implemented over a three year period. The implementation period is expected to run from September 2020 to August 2023.

Members were informed of the extensive analysis which was carried out across the region to identify strengths and areas for improvement. On 4th September the regional plan was ratified by the Directors of Education with subsequent inaugural meeting of the ALN Regional Project Board which took place on the 17th September.

Members were presented with the Plan along with 8 identified regional priorities:

- Creating a multi- agency, multi – disciplinary regional implementation plan that underpins the successful transition to the new way of working
- Delivering an awareness raising programme that ensures all professionals, parents, carers , children and young people and the 3rd sector receive timely information about reforms and associated timescales
- Implementing a comprehensive workforce development plan that is compliant with ALNET Act and complementary to the wider national education reforms.
- Developing support and provision for post compulsory –aged learners through identifying local offers and where possible consider regional solutions to meet complex needs.
- Ensuring that the new statutory expectations for early years are understood and delivered and that appropriate support is provided to increase capacity in early years settings
- Improving strategic engagement with health to support the establishment of the statutory role of the Designated Educational Clinical Lead Officer and develop shared expectations and supportive working practices

- Reviewing Welsh Medium provision and specialist support to increased regional capacity through the development of best practice Welsh language learning pathways
- Supporting the rights of the child and young person with ALN through the development of user – friendly practices that clearly explain and promote their rights of appeal.

The Head of ALN Transformation Lead Central South Region along with the Director of Education and Inclusion gave an overview of where as an authority we want to be and what we need to do next to ensure the Plan is ready for implementation within the prescribed timescales starting in September 2020 with complete systems becoming operational from 2023.

The Chair thanked the ALN Transformational Lead Central South Region for her report and opened the meeting up for questions.

A Member thanked the officers for the comprehensive report and asked for further detail in relation to Priority 8 and the need to establish parent and children and young people forums so as to seek views of how best to provide support about the new ALN system. It was explained that this is the first plan and the impact of the plan will have to be fed back to Members on results at a later date.

A Member queried why there was a need for a new Act. It was highlighted that the Plan highlights the priorities for regional implementation. Members were informed that the old framework was not fit for purpose and that Welsh Government considered that pupils' needs were not being met. The core aim of the Act is to improve outcomes and the early identification of needs as opposed to resources.

Members were concerned over the financial assistance that will be provided for the authority in implementing the new system. It was explained that the Welsh Government is providing financial assistance through the ANL Transformation Grant. It was explained that the grant is in its second year and it will be available for a total of four financial years. In response to the answer Members asked what will happen after the Government assistance has been withdrawn, the officer explained that it would have to be considered at a later date.

A Member explained that he attended an event in respect of the ALN Act and the literature provided was very informative and helpful. The Member indicated he would send the Democratic Service Officer the documentation and she would distribute it to all Members of the Committee.

After further discussion Members thanked Officers for the information provided in the report, Members RESOLVED to:

- Acknowledge the context of the report
- Receive updated information when available

- Democratic Services Officer will send the appropriate literature out to Members of the Committee.

21. REVIEW OF FIXED PENALTY NOTICES FOR REGULAR NON – SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing explained to Members that the purpose of the report was to provide Members with an overview of the fixed penalty notices (FPNs) for regular non–school attendance scheme to date. Included in the report is the national and local context, along with local usage trends over the three academic years the scheme has been in existence. It also includes an analysis of the short term impact on individuals and whole school attendance rates.

The report provides Members with a platform to scrutinise the data and offers Members suggestions for a future Code of Conduct to manage the scheme. Members were informed that the Welsh Government enacted the Education (Penalty Notices) (Wales) regulations in 2013, which allows FPNs to be issued to parents for regular unauthorised absence by their children. In Rhondda Cynon Taf the Code of Conduct for Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN's) for non–attendance became operational in September 2014.

It was explained to Members that the Original Code of Conduct was based on the template provided by Welsh Government in 2014 and produced for academic year 2014/15 stated that the Code should be reviewed annually to ensure it remained fit for purpose.

Members considered the usage of the scheme under the following headings:

- Total School usage
- Criteria for requesting an FPN
- Warning letters Issued
- FPN's Issued
- Court Proceedings Initiated, and
- Withdrawals.

Members questioned officers in respect of the revenue generated from the Scheme, Members were informed that issuing FPNs for irregular school attendance is not an income-raising scheme, the aim of the scheme is to discourage absence from school and to maximise children and young people's time in education. It was explained that all income received from the FPNs is used to operate the scheme and the overall costs outweigh the income due to the high administrative burden of the scheme.

Members continued to scrutinise the report in great detail and considered the consultation that had taken place with the public and schools along with the national evaluation of FPNs for regular non –school attendance.

In concluding her report the Head of Attendance and Wellbeing explained that working with schools, parents and the wider community, attitudes to school

attendance in RCT has changed through increased awareness of the impact of absenteeism has on the educational outcome for children in RCT.

In respect of the new School Attendance Strategy it aims to re-literate the message that a pupil chance of succeeding is increased with greater participation in quality education.

Members thanked the officers for the report and put their questions and observations forward.

In respect of the figure showing attendance rates decreasing compared to previous years, Members felt that there is more work that needs to be done to the strategy. It was felt that a further piece of work by the Committee could be carried out to look at ways of encouraging parents and pupils to maximise school attendance along with looking at holiday and sickness absences. Members agreed that a small working group would be set up to consider the FPNs with in schools.

Members asked whether there has been a great change to holidays in term time due to the publication of the Assembly Petitions Committee Report. It was explained that there has been a fluctuation in the number of schools requesting FPNs over the past few academic years which appears that much of this is due to the change in the Welsh Government's communication of managing holidays in term time. It was explained that this has resulted in some head teachers not wishing to appear to penalise families for taking this type of leave of absence.

Members raised concerns over the points in the report that highlights that some schools have indicated that some parents are reporting absences as sickness absence in order to prevent a potentially unauthorised holiday absence.

Members felt that as an authority we could look at ways of being more flexible, as many families living in Rhondda Cynon Taf are on low income and finances are limited and by going on holiday during term time this would save families an incredible amount of money. Members suggest looking at alternative measure to deal with the situation which in turn would improve communication between head teachers and parents.

A Member queried sickness absences and felt it was a sensitive issue which needs to be considered cautiously. With increasing concerns over the health and wellbeing of pupils with long term health needs, the added pressure of a fixed penalty notice for families can cause extra pressure on families and schools. The officer explained that partnership working between health and the attendance and wellbeing service is positive but could potentially be strengthened.

After a further discussion Members **RESOLVED** to:

- Acknowledge the report

- Set up a Working Group to scrutinise further the Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) for non-school attendance.

Chair Cllr S. Rees –Owen

Meeting Closed at 18:55pm

